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ABSTRACT

This working paper is one in a series of policy statements on the relationship between liberal education and careers in business. In this presentation, the president of the University of Chicago suggests that the importance of understanding education, particularly liberal arts education, as a complex subject is critical in understanding the relationship between liberal learning and private enterprise. Education, corporations, and management have a complex relationship that must be understood in order to put liberal arts in the proper perspective for the future. All people have ideas and theories about education, but little emphasis is placed on specific and complex ways of looking at changes in institutions of higher education and their relationship to other institutions. When considering education, it is necessary to bring in other topics, since thinking about education is in many ways like thinking about the future, present, and past. Ideas about what constitutes a good education have changed over the years; a liberal arts education was championed by the Renaissance humanists, who opposed the "sterile academicians" of their time. Liberal arts must be shown to be currently relevant in ways that differ from the merely technical or professional training. A fuller, more detailed sense of context for developing and teaching liberal arts is necessary. (SM)

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WORKING PAPER 1

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CORPORATE COUNCIL ON THE LIBERAL ARTS, established in 1984, with support from CBS Inc. has as a primary goal a heightened understanding of the relationship between liberal arts education and effective management and leadership in the corporate world. A carefully planned program of research, workshops, conferences, and publications constitutes the work of the Council. The Corporate Council is affiliated with the Center for Advanced Study in Education of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

EDUCATION AS A WAY OF REFLECTING ON THE FUTURE

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Dr. Gray's comments were presented at a symposium, "Corporations at Risk: Liberal Learning and Private Enterprise," held by the Corporate Council on the Liberal Arts on September 3, 1986, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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In order to understand the relationship between liberal learning and private enterprise, we must examine the complicated web of questions and words which wrap together our assumptions about the liberal arts and liberal education, what it is, and what it should do. President Gray challenges us to understand education, including liberal arts education, as a complex subject, rather more complex than is generally assumed. She suggests that the relationship of education to corporations and management may also be complex. Dr. Gray observes that if we are to understand the role of the liberal arts for the future, we need to understand how and why the liberal arts have evolved. The liberal arts must constantly be "reinvented" in order to maintain the delicate balance between preserving valued traditions and stimulating creativity to respond to a changing world.

Thank you very much indeed. Following so closely on an eminent and eloquent preacher, I feel that I should begin my discourse with three texts for our reflection.

The first has something to do with the theme of this occasion. I remind you of the ancient description of education: "An education enables you to earn more than an educator."

The second is a text that has to do with the institutional context within which our discussion today takes place, and it comes from the world of baseball. Dale Berra, the "chip off the old block" of Yogi, was once asked how he and his father were alike and different. He responded, "Well, our similarities are different."

And third, since this is the three hundred and fiftieth birthday, more or less, of Harvard University, I would like to recall a final text. In 1935, Gertrude Stein, a graduate of Radcliffe College, and therefore, I assume, retroactively a graduate of Harvard University--that seems to have happened to those of us who were graduates of Radcliffe College--was, for reasons that I do not understand, asked to write a series of articles for the *New York Herald Tribune*. One of these was devoted to education. She wrote on American education and colleges as follows: "Education is thought about, and as it is thought about, it is being done; it is being done in the way it is thought about, which is not true of almost anything." She then went on, "Almost anything is not done in the way in which it is thought about but education, and it is done in the way it is thought about, and that is the reason so much of it is done in New England and Switzerland."

"There is an extraordinary amount of it done in New England and Switzerland," wrote Miss Stein. "In New England they have done it, they do it, they will do it, and they do it every way in which education can be thought about." And finally, "I find education everywhere, and in New England it is everywhere. It is thought about everywhere in America, everywhere. But only in New England is it done as much as it is thought about. And that is saying a very great deal. They do it so much in New England that they even do it more than it is thought about."

Miss Stein was wrong. That is, I think, the first thing

to be said. It is not true that education is being done in the way in which it is thought about. If it were we might be in still deeper trouble. Or at least we would not necessarily be in less trouble. There is a tendency in talking about education--however valuable and worthy the thoughts that we express--always to create either a very abstract image of "the education" that we think ought to be thought about and done, or else an overly concrete picture of education as it really ought to be done and only later thought about.

It seems to me that on this occasion, where I take it that we are all of like mind and not likely to fight with each other very much, it is important to say that for all the agreements we have, and for all the excellence of the ideas and themes expressed in the papers prepared for this conference, education has not been thought about in as complex ways as education must be thought about. And I would rather suspect that the same is true of the thinking about the nature of the corporate and managerial aspects of what it is that education, in terms of the liberal arts and its relevance, might be for.

It is a fact that everybody is an historian and everybody is an educational theorist. Everybody believes himself or herself to be an expert on education, and, as we know, everybody knows something about history and readily will tell you the meaning of history. When you put those two things together, you usually get a mess. You usually get a bunch of people who talk about how much better things were in the old days, which is both bad history and, often, an entirely abstract concept upon which to build a picture of education.

We are full of images of "golden ages" nowadays; we are full of images of how much better things were in the past. These images come to us from many of the reports made recently about education and through the thinking

that has something to do with what we are doing at this conference as well. We are told that there was a past--it is a little dim as to when that past was--when there existed a kind of coherent consensus on the values that ought to animate liberal education, and presumably a past in which that coherent consensus expressed itself in the creation of people, as well as in the education of people, along lines that should--if only they could--be reestablished now. This idealization of the past is expressed as though there had been very little major transformation, not only in the social universe within which higher education takes place, not only in the nature of the institutions within which higher education takes place, but also as though the series of attitudes--political and social--that dominate thinking about higher education in this day and age could be transformed by a return to that past.

I realize that people do not literally believe the past is something that can be renewed, and yet in the excellent discourses that have been provided for our benefit there is very little that is properly "historical" and therefore would enable us to think in a more specific and more complicated way about what has happened to the institutions of higher education, what has happened in the relationship of those institutions to other institutions in our society, and what it is that has changed that cannot be turned back as well as what it is that has changed that may in fact have strengthened higher education in our time. Just as all of us are educational theorists, and to some degree educational theorists masquerading as historians, very little has been said in these discourses about the sense in which to think about education is to think about something quite beyond education.

It is not, obviously, by accident that the great "Utopias" provide programs of education. Whether you think of

Plato, Thomas More, or Rousseau, every utopian scheme carries with it a system of education, and many utopian or quasi-utopian points of view are based on a concept of education. Not only do those systems imply a certain kind of faith in education, and in how educable and "shapeable" people are, but they imply also a whole series of values and ideals about the human personality, about human possibility, about what it is that one hopes for one's children and for a future society.

In other words, thinking about education is a way of reflecting on the future, and the future that one would like to see; it is a way of thinking about the present, and what it is that is deficient within the present; and finally, it is a way of thinking about the past, and seeing what it is within the past that needs either to be repudiated or renewed. Education then becomes the instrument, or the vehicle, for this way of thinking about a larger world and about the essence of what human possibility, human personality, and human competence might ideally become within a social order.

That being the case, it is, of course, not surprising that ideas of education, and of what is ultimately most valuable in education, have changed over the centuries. One could write the intellectual history of those centuries through writing about the ideas of and the disputes over education that have taken place. Sometimes, of course, those controversies have to do with our institutions of education; sometimes they have to do with our differing beliefs about the objectives of education and about the potential which education might help people to reach; sometimes they have to do with disagreements over the objectives and the limitations of the social order itself.

When we come, then, to the liberal arts, it is the case, I think, that over historical time, when the liberal arts have been defined, defended, attacked, it has always been

within the context of some notion not only of this kind--of the human order, of human possibility, of human intelligence and how it could be stretched into and translated into a better society, a better order of the future--but it has always been expressed in some sense in terms of the relevance of the liberal arts. And here I would like to say that the conflict that is so much talked about nowadays is not simply between "liberal" and "vocational" education, but also between something thought of as "academic" and "liberal" education. And so it has always been.

Our own concept and practice of the liberal arts, while described--properly--as deriving from the ancient world, comes--still more immediately--from the Renaissance world. And it is no accident that at the time of the revival of the ideals of a liberal education, and a liberal cultivation, the Renaissance humanists attacked the scholastics of their time, and indeed attacked them in such a way that they caricatured them as "sterile academicians" who were uninterested in and uncaring for what ought to be at the heart of education and of human intelligence: namely, thinking about the nature of the human condition and equipping people to lead a good life. This, they said, was diametrically opposed to what the scholastic philosophers, the theologians, and those who taught law in the universities of that day were all about. And that notion, therefore, that the liberal education, and the liberal arts, provided a more relevant body of knowledge, a more relevant body of training, a more relevant context for the development of that kind of sense of human purpose and expression of human possibility, was contrasted directly to what was caricatured, in many ways, as the "merely academic" character of philosophy or the study of law. One might say, in a sense, that the humanists were opposing both professional training and pre-professional training, in our terms,

and, finally, that there was in them something that was anti-academic and close in many ways to anti-intellectual.

If we now jump, in a way that I have just criticized too many people for doing, to our own time, it seems to me that in the current defense of the liberal arts--which is something I agree with strongly--there is still involved not only the sense that they must be shown to be relevant--relevant in a way that is not simply utilitarian, relevant in a sense that is not simply instrumental, relevant in a way that differs from the so-called "vocational" character of a merely technical or professional training--but also the sense (and this I deplore) that the liberal arts are to be contrasted to the institutional mission which also accompanies undergraduate education in the liberal arts, which has to do with a concern for scholarship, a concern for the intellectual life in and of itself. There is often an uneasy alliance, clearly, between the worlds of scholarship and research on the one hand and those of undergraduate teaching on the other. We know that to be an ancient conflict in the development of our universities, and even of our colleges.

Yet I think that one cannot stereotype, as is frequently done, the world of scholarship and research as though there were people simply concerned about their own specializations, doing a kind of work that was in conflict with the liberal arts. I think we need a much richer, and much more clearly elaborated, sense of the context within which the liberal arts are developed and taught, where the concern for scholarship and the value set on the life of the mind--including the value set on the search for certain kinds of discoveries or interpretations that may never be quite possible, and may often be quite unexpected--is also a part of the environment. Instead, we hear only about the extracurricular life of students, and about the sense in

which the institution or the college may create a community within which another kind of education goes forward, either reinforcing or expressing the liberal arts mission of the institution. And I think we would do well, at a time in which there is the constant pressure to emphasize outcomes, to emphasize relevance, to speak also of--and to be strong advocates for--the values of the scholarly mentality and of the aspiration that underlies and drives the best of what we think of as the life of the intellect.

It is well to remind ourselves, as I am sure we all have, that there are many different understandings of the liberal arts and that the change over time is a change that must accompany the evolution of new ways of perceiving reality, of new methods of analyzing knowledge, of new approaches to the expansion of knowledge, and that therefore the liberal arts have constantly to be reinvented. Each tradition of the liberal arts has turned into its own form of scholasticism at some time, and each new version of the liberal arts has then been "grounded" in the sense of a new opportunity for that extension of human purpose, of human competence, and of social development.

At the same time, we are often unclear, as we talk about the liberal arts, whether they are a "thing," a "set of skills," a "curriculum." I think Nan Keohane's emphasis on the tension within the liberal arts themselves, between the preservation and cultivation of a tradition and of the past--the "classicistic" side, so to speak--and creativity, the creation of what is new, and the freedom and independence to look beyond received knowledge, is a very good description of that problem. Just as we are unclear as to whether the liberal arts are a thing, we are unclear as to whether it is the substance of or the qualities associated with the liberal arts that we are talking about. Just as we tend to emphasize "relevance" as though it represented a pure quality

as opposed to vocationalism, sounding in some cases--I am sure unintentionally--either anti-academic or anti-intellectual, so too it is unclear whether in the end we are talking about the liberal arts as having to do with the shaping of people or the shaping of minds, understanding that we are presumably talking about both these things.

Finally, in the particular dialogue we are involved in, it is unclear what we are talking about when we talk about the corporation. Are we talking about leadership *per se*? Are we talking about managerial competence, with an internal capacity for continuing growth? Are we talking about corporations as though they were a single kind of organization, just as we tend to talk about colleges or universities, even though we know how pluralistic that world is? Are we talking about corporate leadership, or management capacity, as something different in kind, to which the liberal arts are relevant, or do we really mean that "becoming educated in some sense" is good for corporate leaders as it is good for other people in the world? And are we talking about corporate leadership only, or are we talking about the many forms of leadership or competence that the liberal arts--we hope--may help us to develop and to internalize?

I am not really clear about all that. And I am not really clear either whether we are talking about the dreadful consequences of too many undergraduate majors in business, or whether we are talking about what might be seen as the limitations of professional schools, and therefore graduate schools of business as well. We have tended, I think, to collapse all these terms into rather simpler language than we probably believe in, and at the same time I think we probably, on the whole, believe--vaguely, at least, and sufficiently--the same things. So what I have tried to do is to introduce a slightly quarrelsome note, and to say

that education has to do with complicating things, and thereby enriching them, and that I do not think that we have yet complicated them enough.

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